Metacinema in Contemporary Chinese Film

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Introduction

Wong Kar-wai's critically acclaimed *In the Mood for Love* (*Huayang nianhua*, 2000) cast Rebecca Pan in the supporting role of the landlady, Mrs. Suen. Pan, of course, has a distinguished singing and acting career going back to the 1960s, the very setting of the film *In the Mood for Love*. The film's Chinese title, likewise, is borrowed from a popular song of the time, "When Flowers were in Full Bloom," performed by Zhou Xuan in the 1947 film *All-Consuming Love* (*Chang xiangsi*, dir. He Zhaozhang) and heard as part of a radio program during Wong's film. In the same year (2000), Ang Lee's smash hit *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (*Wohu canglong*) also cast an illustrious former star in an important supporting role: Zheng Peipei played the role of the villainess Jade Fox. Zheng's career, like Pan's, goes back to the 1960s and includes lead roles in major films directed by famed martial arts directors Chang Cheh and King Hu. Lee's homage to Chinese martial arts film in *Crouching Tiger* also notably includes a bamboo forest fight scene that alludes to King Hu's masterful set piece in *A Touch of Zen* (*Xianü*, 1971).[1]

That these contemporary films gesture to a broader Chinese film discourse—both in terms of the institution of a star system generated by the film industry as a whole and in terms of allusions to specific movies—is emblematic of a certain degree of metacinematic self-referentiality reflecting a number of issues that warrant further discussion. To be sure, we see in these and other similar instances nostalgia for a lost past, and perhaps even a kind of postmodern playfulness. That is to say, this self-referentiality simultaneously presents both a longing sigh and a knowing wink. More than this, though, the interplay between that sigh and wink demonstrates a strong sense of the filmmakers' command of the tradition within which they are working as well as an equally strong confidence in their own art to adopt, adapt, and update modes, motifs, images, or what have you in order to meet the needs of the current film.[2] It is precisely this metacinematic mode of engaging the filmic tradition within contemporary films that is the focus of this book. In particular, I am interested in elucidating the affective responses elicited by the metacinematic mode in Chinese cinemas and the various possibilities for action modeled by the metacinematic display of film within film.

Before jumping into a full-fledged discussion of metacinema, however, let me make a few caveats, but also some claims. The metacinematic mode is by no means something new in Chinese film history. Films such as *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen* (*Yinmu yanshi*, 1931, dir. Cheng Bugao) or *Two Stars in the Milky Way* (*Yinhan shuangxing*, 1931, dir. Shi Dongshan) had, from an early moment, figured both film industry and film culture within their own narratives.[3] Likewise, a film such as *Scenes of City Life* (*Dushi fengguang*, 1935, dir. Yuan Muzhi) directly thematizes film mediality and the viewing subject in its narrative.[4] Additionally, the thematic emphasis on viewership and performativity in films such as the leftist masterpiece *Street Angel* (*Malu tianshi*, 1937, dir. Yuan Muzhi) or Xie Jin's red classic *Stage Sisters* (*Wutai jiemei*, 1964), to name only two, have always already implicated film in their elaborations of these themes. Further, this book does not claim that the metacinematic mode is necessarily ubiquitous in contemporary Chinese films. At the same time, it is by no means absent. And as the brief examples of *In the Mood for Love* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* I cited at the beginning indicate, there is even a certain trend of the metacinematic in contemporary Chinese films that the attentive viewer can pick out. As I will argue in more detail below, this metacinematic trend in Chinese films of the last few decades constitutes a discourse on film arising from within the films themselves, and as such, outlines the potential for film's social and aesthetic impact.

The chapters that follow this introduction will take the form of close readings of individual films rather than historical overviews rigidly defining this metacinematic trend. These close readings of specific examples of metacinema in Chinese films drawn from the 1990s and 2000s are not meant to be taken as exhaustive of the subject. It would not be difficult to extend this study to considerations of any number of other examples of metacinematic films. Indeed, insofar as I take genre conventions and their adaption and extension to be implicitly metacinematic (more on this below), the reach of the metacinematic into contemporary Chinese films expands dramatically. At the same time, the examples I raise include films originating from all of the three main Chinese geographic areas of production: the PRC, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. My examples also encompass a wide variety of modes of address including blockbuster hits, transnationally financed art house films, Fifth Generation, Sixth Generation, studio backed, and independently produced movies. To be sure, the differences reflected by these various industrial and financial bases are important to the close readings I offer in each case. But the recurrence of the metacinematic mode across this broad swath of Chinese cinemas is indicative of its relevance for understanding Chinese films today. Thus, the close readings I offer here are intended to broadly trace some of the contours of the discourse on film within film and to demonstrate some of the possibilities this line of inquiry holds for our understanding of Chinese film more broadly. At the same time, Chinese cinemas are increasingly imbricated in regional and global networks of film production and

circulation. As such, the insights revealed by such a focus on metacinema may also resonate beyond the several Chinese film industries.

Furthermore, the benefit of pursuing close reading, to my mind, is that it enables us to engage questions of the mechanisms and the purposes, the hows and the whys, of metacinema in recent Chinese films. And it is this last focus on means and ends that enables the strongest claim I am making in this space, namely, that through the discourse on film within film we can discover the scope of possible future directions for Chinese films of tomorrow. That is to say, this focus on mechanisms and purposes allows us to visualize their elasticity, stretching to attain new effects, and from there to theorize Chinese film as an evolving practice. I will additionally argue that metacinematic films allow us to theorize the effects movies create in their audiences; indeed, that metacinema allows us to see possible ways of being in the world that audiences may take up for themselves. In this way, attention to the metacinematic in contemporary Chinese films allows us to gauge the cultural, social, and aesthetic implications of Chinese cinemas as a whole. In the end, this is an open-ended process without a predetermined goal. The readings I offer, rather than definitive prescriptions, indicate possibilities for further creative acts that radiate in any number of different directions.

Metacinema

Metacinema is a specific variety of textual reflexivity that foregrounds, to a greater or lesser extent, the mechanisms involved in the creation or reception of film.[5] In general, metacinema may take two forms, which I will term production and consumption. The first and perhaps more common form is the mise-en-abîme presentation within a film of the processes involved in producing a film. A good example of this kind of metacinema is Stanley Kwan's biopic *Centre Stage* (*Ruan Lingyu*, 1991). *Centre Stage* shows the main character, the famous 1930s actress Ruan Lingyu (played by Maggie Cheung), filming scenes from her career in Shanghai's silent film period. Kwan compounds the use of metacinema in this film with the inclusion of shots of himself (and the camera and crew) acting as director of the 1991 film about the 1930s actress. Mise-en-abîme metacinema, thus, tends to reveal the technologies available to filmmakers (including camera angles and shot framing, camera movement, editing, multiple takes, special effects, and so on) in the process of compiling "multiple fragments which are assembled under a new law," to borrow Benjamin's formulation.[6] The effect of this revelation on viewers, as a result, is to expose the man behind the curtain, to show how a movie works, and to reveal the artificiality and constructedness of the finished cinematic product.

The second sort of metacinema focuses on the processes of consuming a film through the presentation of viewers watching a film. In effect, this should be understood as an intertextual act of quotation in which a previous film is cited within the text of the current film. This can be quite brief, as in Ang Lee's film noir *Lust, Caution*

(*Se jie*, 2007) when the protagonist, Wang Jiazhi (played by Tang Wei), spends an afternoon in a movie theater watching George Stevens's Oscar-nominated *Penny Serenade* (1941) to escape the oppression of life in occupied Shanghai circa 1942. The scene of flirtation between the two main characters, Cary Grant's Roger Adams and Irene Dunne's Julie Gardiner, is interrupted by a Japanese wartime propaganda newsreel. More than simply fulfilling plot requirements (Wang's co-conspirators are able to locate her because they know of her fondness for movies), the quotation from *Penny Serenade* parallels themes developed in *Lust, Caution*—romantic love and its origins—while the interruption of the Hollywood film by political indoctrination reinforces the repressive setting of occupied Shanghai. Thus, the use of quotation in film texts, as with other sorts of intertextual practices, is not merely (or is not only) an inside joke for those few initiated who can identify the quotation; rather, it often serves a narrative or thematic function in the text of the current film irrespective of whether viewers are able to identify the quotation's original source.[7]

These are the pure forms of metacinema: the depiction within a movie of either filmmaking or film watching. Respectively, I will refer to them as production and consumption, since these are the functions revealed in each type of metacinematic film. In other words, mise-en-abîme metacinema demonstrates how films are put together and for what purposes, and in this way, provides effective tools for its own analysis and interpretation. On the other hand, the quotation of these very same cinema products within a film discloses aspects of exhibition that may not otherwise be self-evident. That is to say, the focus of attention in moments of quotation is both on how films are presented and on how viewers receive them. Accordingly, consumption metacinema helps us theorize the affective capacity of film and the resulting effects stimulated in film viewers.

The focus on viewership in quotation (or as I am calling it consumption) metacinema is a crucial link tying the two forms of metacinema into a self-reinforcing cycle. This is because the most important aspect of quotation, from my point of view, is the effect watching movies generates in the characters populating the frame film who consume the movies. Of course it could be that, like Madame Bovary, behavior modeled on what we see in the movies is not a terribly wise course of action.[8] For the films that I examine in these pages, however, the fictionality of the movies does not lead us into a fantasy world. Instead, as I will show, there is a much more nuanced and perhaps even enabling aspect to constructing an understanding of the surrounding social environment based on what one has seen in the movies. Specifically, watching fictional movies comes to lead the characters in these films to new ways of being in the world, linking them to their social environment. The movies help these characters frame, understand, and thus traverse the world around them. By analogy we may also see how watching movies can help us, the extradiegetic audience, navigate our own social environments as well. One might even go so far as to claim that attention to metacinema allows us to sketch the realm

of the possible in terms of the kinds of affects generated by film in China today as well as the social and aesthetic effects stemming from those affects.

When we attune ourselves to the metacinematic in contemporary Chinese film, though, without a doubt what we find more frequently is not one of these pure forms but rather any number of a variety of hybrid and abstracted forms. An example of this mixed metacinema, also drawn from Lee's *Lust, Caution*, occurs when Wang comes to a Japanese tea house/brothel in Shanghai to meet her lover, Mr. Yi (played by Tony Leung). During their rendezvous, Wang sings "The Wandering Songstress" (*Tianya genü*) to entertain him. Wang's unrefined rendition, accompanied by only a few small movements and facial gestures, contrasts markedly with the strings and voices of the geishas performing in the adjoining rooms. But at the same time, this simple staging also directly recalls Zhou Xuan's performance.[9] Zhou Xuan made "The Wandering Songstress" famous as part of her role playing Xiaohong in the leftist cinema classic *Street Angel*. In her re-presentation of this popular song, Wang cites the film from which it is drawn, but there is no direct quotation of the original film images, audio or visual. Thus, in the new context of Japanese-occupied Shanghai, she reinvokes not only the connotations of romantic love but also the overall social commitment of the leftist classic. Simultaneously, she marks herself as an insightful and resourceful reader of the movies. In other words, Wang, in singing "The Wandering Songstress," mobilizes anew the meanings that had accrued to the song from its original habitus and directs it towards her own ends. Those ends entail building on the romantic connection with Mr. Yi in order to enable the assassination plot to succeed, removing a Japanese collaborator, and thus strengthening Chinese society. The citation of "The Wandering Songstress," then, is an aesthetic tactic drawn from the movies employed in order to facilitate social (and political) interactions. Simply put, Wang has modeled her behavior on what she has seen in the movies while also adapting it for her own present needs.

More than this, her reading and redeploying of *Street Angel* also makes Wang's character, at least in this instance, correspond to the director of the film. That is to say, if Wang has modeled her behavior on what she has seen in the movies, then by analogy, extradiegetically, we the audience of *Lust, Caution* see the citation of *Street Angel* within Lee's film as yet one more resource available to the filmmaker in the process of constructing the movie. Wang adopts and adapts the filmic technique to elicit a certain affective response from Mr. Yi. At the same time, the song lifted from *Street Angel*, for us the audience perhaps more than for Mr. Yi, solidifies the combination of personal sentiment with social action that is the thematic crux of *Lust, Caution*. Thus, the knowing consumption and redirection of film products points us back to issues of the production and deployment of cultural and specifically cinematic resources through film.

This, then, is the ultimate focus of the present book: to provide an examination of the ways a variety of contemporary Chinese films are intertextually and metacinematically constructed in order to induce affective responses in their audiences.

These audiences then, like Wang Jiazhi singing "The Wandering Songstress," come to organize and engage their social environment in terms of the films they view. I hasten to add, though, this book is by no means a sociological study of viewer response or actual lives. My analysis is entirely textual. Instead, to the extent that I argue people understand their world through the lens of movies, it is really only that some of the characters in the films I examine seem to do so. And yet, inasmuch as these characters and the films in which they live strike us as realistic, plausible, true to life, or even likely, it seems reasonable to assume that they reflect the ways real people—that is, we the audience—may also come to know and navigate the world in which we live. I shall explore this idea in more detail below, but suffice it to say for now that these characters and the film worlds they inhabit serve as models for us on how to be in the world. Before coming to this, however, since it is such an important aspect of metacinema in my analysis, some discussion of genre and generic play is in order.

Genre in Chinese Cinemas

The several Chinese cinemas (principally those of the PRC, Taiwan, and Hong Kong) have undergone a series of rapid changes over the last two decades or so. To name just a few, these include the shift, beginning in the mid-1990s, from state support to market competition for the state-owned studios in the mainland; the rise of independent and underground filmmakers; the inclusion of Hong Kong films as domestic products in the early 2000s (and thus no longer subject to foreign film quotas) after Hong Kong's transition from British colonial rule to a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People's Republic of China in 1997; the financial decline of Taiwan's film industry (that has only recently started to reverse) paralleled by the international acclaim given to a few Taiwanese auteur directors; the availability of digital video technology; transnational financing of film products in the form both of co-productions and joint venture film production companies with foreign (often, but not exclusively, Hollywood) and domestic partners; the increasingly common inclusion of Chinese films (including productions originating from all three industries) in international film festivals and the foreign distribution deals this leads to; and the rise of pan-Asian filmmaking strategies to spread risk and expand audiences. The production capabilities and structures underlying the various Chinese cinema industries have thus been altered dramatically in response to these changes. Though metacinema has certainly always had a role in Chinese films, it may be that the contemporary prevalence of metacinema in Chinese movies is in part a result of these transformations in the film industries of Taiwan, the mainland, and Hong Kong. In fact, Jason McGrath has suggested, following Robert Stam, that metacinema is likely to become prominent in just such transitional moments.[10] That is to say, disruptions to and innovations in technical, financial, and social capabilities lead filmmakers to directly consider cinema and its functions. These structural changes, then, have led

to reflection on the film medium itself—its modes, means, limits, and potential—from within the cinema industries of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the PRC. At the same time, the exchanges across these increasingly fluid divisions seem to be mirrored in metacinematic exchanges among Chinese films. In other words, the prevalence of metacinema in contemporary Chinese films reflects on the textual and intertextual level the increased power and frequency of film industry interactions on a Chinese regional scale.[11] This certainly helps explain why we see metacinematic practices spanning across the industries of Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the PRC over the same time frame.

One of the most noticeable changes, at least as far as mainland Chinese film is concerned, is the rise of commercial films designed to attract audiences. This is a direct result of being subjected to market forces. Instead of producing films solely for propagandistic reasons of promoting the state's interests, films now need to generate return on investment, which demands that people choose to spend their disposable income and leisure time in the movie theater. To a greater or lesser extent, the Hong Kong and Taiwanese film industries had always been working in such market conditions, and the movement of "talent" (directorial, acting, and artistic) from these industries into the mainland reflects the new need for navigating market forces as well as the gravitational pull of the mainland's greater financial resources. It must be emphasized that these flows are not restricted to talent, but also include film products, and moreover that these flows are longstanding and multidirectional. It is only that the speed of exchange among these industries has accelerated recently. Add to this the increasingly global pool of financial resources backing film productions, and the result is that it becomes quite difficult to firmly distinguish between the Hong Kong, PRC, and Taiwanese industries. Instead, these are increasingly interwoven nodes embedded within regional, transnational, and global networks of film production and exchange.

One approach in scholarship on Chinese cinemas to this increasing imbrication of the PRC, Taiwanese, and Hong Kong film industries is to organize research around the notion of Chinese-language film. Sheldon Lu and Emily Yueh-yu Yeh's edited volume *Chinese-Language Film: Historiography, Poetics, Politics* (2005) introduced this formulation to English-language scholarship. I understand the term Chinese-language film not to work towards a conflation of the different industries into one unified whole. Instead, it indicates the complex interactions and shared linguistic and cultural histories, which inform the parallel but distinct developments of these Chinese cinemas. Lu has recently reformulated this idea in the following way:

> A common denominator of Chinese-language films is that they all use Chinese language(s) and Chinese dialects, whether Mandarin or local dialects. Yet, language is not the only link among all. Culture, history, nation, tradition, territory and politics enter the scene as well. These various elements enter a cinematic field of dialogue, negotiation and contestation. In this very process, these things are

questioned, deconstructed, reconstructed and reconfigured. The modern nation state is not necessarily the primary or exclusive point of departure in the study of Chinese-language cinema. Traditional, linear, nationalist historiography is but one mode of writing film history, sometimes inadequate to the task. In the enlarged, open-ended framework of transnational Chinese-language cinema, film history is rewritten with multiple lines of narration, many focal points and various perspectives.[12]

Given the immensely complex and fraught politics and history behind the various film industries (and locales) of Taiwan, the PRC, and Hong Kong, we cannot but view the category of the nation as an all too common limitation on our analysis. This is because the local, national, and regional identities informed and sustained in individual film products are always already contested, both in the film texts themselves as well as in their audiences. At the same time, shared cultural and historical roots, in combination with increasing interconnection at the regional and global scales, means that films from the PRC, Hong Kong, or Taiwan resonate with audiences—though, to be sure, not always at the same frequencies—in all three locales, not to mention in Sinophone communities across the world or even non-Chinese audiences.[13] Though I do not frequently use the term Chinese-language film in this study, my discussions of the various films I consider in the chapters that follow is similarly oriented towards a conception that notes the links between the industries without reducing them to one homogenous unity.

Perhaps the clearest example of such forces at work is *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Ang Lee, the Taiwanese-American director of this film, successfully navigated the intricacies of Asian film production by marshaling financing from across Asia as well as Hollywood, employing actors and other talent from the mainland, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Malaysia, as well as North America, and filming on location in the mainland with Mandarin dialogue. The result was a global smash hit grossing US$213.5 million.

Simultaneous with the rise of this newly mainstream and popular Chinese cinema are the increasing numbers of so-called underground or independent filmmakers that work more or less completely outside the studio system. Much of this work is filmed in social realist modes that comment on contemporary social conditions within China; indeed, a significant proportion of it is documentary film. Often, these filmmakers do not request or receive permission from state authorities to film, and as such, the only venues for exhibition of their films are abroad: typically film festivals and art house theaters. A good example of this sort of film is Li Yang's *Blind Shaft* (*Mangjing*, 2004), which depicts the life of coal miners in northwestern China, was filmed on location including inside illegal mines, and received foreign financial support while post-production work was done in Australia. As these films enter the film festival circuit, they join (and compete with) the already established Taiwanese and Hong Kong art films of such famous directors as Hou Hsiao-hsien, Wong Kar-wai, Ann Hui, and Tsai Ming-liang.

It is worth pausing for a moment, here, to note that the convergences I have been describing among the various Chinese film industries of Taiwan, the PRC, and Hong Kong do not reflect a smooth development of increasing homogenization. Rather, this process is uneven, asymmetrical, and discontinuous. The effects of the convergence are probably most apparent at the level of large-scale commercial film, while the famous art directors I mentioned above continue to be associated with (and thus serve as representatives of) the locales of their own personal origins. That is to say, Wong Kar-wai or Hou Hsiao-hsien, more than as Chinese per se, are perceived as iconic Hong Kong or Taiwanese filmmakers respectively. This is irrespective of the fact that they may serve as producers on films helmed by peers from other Chinese industries.[14] At the same time, even for blockbuster commercial cinema, it would be wrong to say that there is a clear trajectory towards unification of the three industries. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* may again be the best example illustrating this. Despite the film's astounding success at the box office, Chinese-speaking audiences found the barrage of non-standard Mandarin jarring and inauthentic. Thus, despite the way a unified cultural China is mythologized in the film, specific audiences continue to locate themselves in their own places and times.[15] Likewise, different audiences bore different expectations in regards to martial arts feats or special effects that were satisfied to lesser or greater degrees in their various viewings of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. In this regard, I see my work here moving in tandem with Chris Berry's recent call for a revamped transnational approach to cinema. In his study of Sino-Korean connections, Berry argues for a historiography of transnational cinema that marks the unevenness and asymmetry in the links forged. He says, "They do not produce a cause-and-effect logic leading in a triumphal growth model of so-called progress to expansion beyond the borders of the nation-state. Instead, their resistance to integration reveals Sino-Korean film connections as a history of fragments, structured by disjuncture."[16] If my focus on the metacinematic is not technically transnational in the same way as Berry's is, it still strives to mark the connections that obtain across the Chinese film industries while also noting how any comprehensive account must be "structured by disjuncture."

It is for this reason that I have spoken of convergences, nodes, and especially cinemas—in the plural—as a means of highlighting the imperfect, incomplete, and ultimately impossible unification of one authentically "Chinese" cinema. In other words, we can discern both centripetal and centrifugal forces at work simultaneously as the networks linking the film industries of the PRC, Taiwan, and Hong Kong (and beyond them also Japan, South Korea, Bollywood, and Hollywood, among others) are established and solidified. For the purposes of this study on metacinematic practices, it is useful to emphasize the connections drawn and mutual cross-influences generated by this networked conglomeration of industries. This is not to deny the specificities of each industry to its own locale; indeed, when it is relevant to the interpretations I will offer, I am sure to include a discussion of

these specificities. Still, on the whole, in order to better elucidate the crossover of metacinematic techniques, and perhaps especially that of genre, I will be predominantly interested in elaborating the links between these three industries.

It is in this context of the increasingly regional convergences (albeit disjointedly and unevenly so) of the several Chinese film industries, which, in turn, are progressively connected to global cinema networks, that I would like to situate a discussion of genre. A key, though not the only, metacinematic mode examined in this book is genre. Though often dynamic in concept, genre is not frequently thought of in metacinematic terms, and thus requires some explanation in regards to how I will use it in the present study. I find the importance of genre as a concept in its role not only as an industry tactic for fund-raising and marketing, but more importantly as a cultural signifying practice. The notion of film genre—as collective semiotic codes adopted, adapted, updated, or subverted to meet the needs of any individual film—allows insights into the changes contemporary Chinese cinemas are undergoing both in their diversity and as an overall aesthetic process.[17] I take genres not to be static categories conducive to lists of films that either are or are not examples of that genre. Rather, I understand every instance of genre as making some, no matter how small, variation on the basic template. Thus, genres are always already mixed and hybrid, shifting and evolving.[18] And it is this plastic nature of genre that leads to the generation of new possibilities for film practice.

To be sure, for films such as the Pang brothers' horror hit *The Eye* (*Jian gui*, 2002), it is quite easy to determine to which genre they belong since they largely conform to the conventions that have grown up around that genre. In this space, however, I will be less concerned with such straightforward cases and more interested in examples that engage and deploy genre conventions not simply as verifications and fulfillment of audience expectation but rather as part of the process of generating new narrative and thematic opportunities in the film. It is in this sense that my focus on genre in the chapters that follow should be understood as metacinematic. In other words, the analysis of genre in the films I examine here is meant to elucidate the process of meaning formation in contemporary Chinese cinema. More than that, as specifically cinematic aspects of the films, they reveal the explicitly filmic mechanisms of generating cultural and social implications derived from the tension and interplay fashioned between creating and watching films. Or again, it is precisely because of the fact that the ways genre can be invoked and manipulated parallel the ways, for example, Wang Jiazhi invokes and manipulates *Street Angel* when she sings "The Wandering Songstress," that I argue for the metacinematic capacity of genre play in films.

We should be careful to note that genre in Chinese cinemas does not map exactly one-for-one onto notions of Hollywood genres in standard film studies. When one speaks of genre in the context of Chinese film, the immediate image conjured is probably martial arts, that seemingly quintessential Chinese (or more broadly, Asian) genre. Certainly, martial arts films can be thought of as a subset of action

films, but the genre's distinctive qualities argue for its own category. Indeed, martial arts is one of the earliest and most successful of indigenous Chinese genres, going back at least to the craze for "fiery films" that arose in the wake of the success of *Burning of the Red Lotus Temple* (*Huoshao hongliansi*, 1928, dir. Zhang Shichuan).[19] Likewise, films featuring singing—related to but not the same as the Hollywood musical—have a long history on the Chinese screen.[20] Among these, the Chinese opera film genre is particularly prevalent and owes more to traditional dramatic forms than anything else. Melodramas, perhaps the most common of genres across the history of Chinese filmmaking, share many features with Hollywood weepies, but they are also heavily influenced by Confucian morality. The differences created by this Confucian influence have made it possible to refer to them simply as family ethics (*jiating lunli*) films. Additionally, on the mainland in the years following the communist revolution, the film industry served the state completely. Accordingly, state interests determined output, distribution, and exhibition with no regard for profitability. In these circumstances, genre designates merely any individual film's content (e.g., war film, model opera film, and so on), not its mode of address, which always remained that of state discourse.[21] More recently, Fifth Generation films have almost become their own unique genre specializing in signifying Chineseness through sweeping historical and cultural allegories.[22]

Such distinctions are not insignificant and must be taken into account. Nevertheless, as I have already suggested, beginning in the 1990s there have been dramatic changes in the various Chinese film industries. In terms of the present discussion of genre, these industrial changes have led to a further globalization of genre categories. As we can see even in my brief discussion above, western and especially American Hollywood films have from the beginning exerted an outsize influence on Chinese cinema.[23] If in the first two dozen years or so following the PRC's establishment, Soviet and other communist bloc films replaced Hollywood as the most important external influence, for Hong Kong and Taiwan the commercial cinema of the West remained influential. This influence has only strengthened in more recent decades, while it has also become multidirectional. The influence of martial arts films on Hollywood action movies is undeniable. Hollywood has even gone so far as to remake any number of Chinese, Japanese, or Korean hits of recent years: the most prominent of these is, of course, Martin Scorsese's Oscar-winning *The Departed* (2006), which is remade from Andrew Lau and Alan Mak's Hong Kong–produced *Infernal Affairs* (*Wujiandao*, 2002).[24] This phenomenon is not limited to commercial cinema. Art film, too, with the increasing prominence and success of Taiwanese, Hong Kong, and mainland filmmakers at international film festivals, not to mention art film directors who were educated abroad, has undergone a similar globalizing process of mutual cross influences across industries and regions.[25] As these examples indicate, it should not be difficult to show that most film genres can by now be thought of as global genres. If for no other reason than the growing interconnectedness of global capitalist flows which enable the continual exchange

of cinema products throughout the world, in terms of filmmaking, the interaction of the global and the local is increasingly marked by hierarchically arranged cross influences that impact future productions.

Take, for example, the controversy created in 2010 when the phenomenally popular *Avatar* (2009, dir. James Cameron) was pulled from Chinese theaters to make way for the phenomenal flop *Confucius* (*Kongzi*, 2010, dir. Hu Mei). The roots of the controversy in protectionist PRC national rules limiting not only annual foreign film imports but also when they can screen need not concern us just yet.[26] For our immediate purposes, from the perspective of genre, the controversy pits one blockbuster film in the science fiction genre against another blockbuster film in the historical epic/biopic genre. Neither the provenance of where the films were produced (Hollywood versus Beijing) nor the language of the films' dialogues (English versus Mandarin Chinese) fundamentally changes the generic classifications that obtain for these films. Additionally, both films are presented as blockbusters, which here serves as a sort of overarching metagenre indicating not narrative content or style but rather a large budget and corresponding production values, grand scale, and reliance on special effects. The main difference between the two films has been that one was successful and the other was not, at least not without state support.

This last comment directs us to acknowledge the continuing (if somewhat diminished) role of state discourse in PRC cinema. The so-called main melody (*zhuxuanlü*) films, which are designed less to earn a profit and more to promote various ideological outlooks deemed beneficial to the state, have been in recent years increasingly packaged as blockbusters of epic proportions. In this particular case, the Chinese audience voted with their feet, but other main melody films, notably *The Founding of a Republic* (*Jianguo daye*, 2009, dir. Han Sanping and Huang Jianxin), have been remarkably successful. For Taiwanese or Hong Kong (and Hollywood) films that wish to be screened in the PRC, too, such considerations of state discourse—at the very least not to raise "sensitive" issues—cannot be avoided and will affect any generic choices the filmmakers make. Given the growing size of the film market in the PRC, filmmakers (Taiwanese, mainland, Hong Kong, and foreign) increasingly hope to be able to show their product in the mainland and so tailor their films to meet these (and other) concerns of the mainland authorities as well as the preferences of the general audience in the mainland.

The various cross influences and conflicts that come to light even in this very brief discussion of the *Avatar-Confucius* incident illustrate a number of points. One of the more important things to notice is that genres often layer one on another within the same film. This capacity for films to display features of several genres also enables the sort of metacinematic genre play that is a central concern of the present study. Frequently, it is the tension developed between multiple genres and the variety of combinations possible that enables genre to play a metacinematic role. Another point to take away, however, is that film genre is a global commodity that circulates (albeit, with uneven distribution) just as surely as coffee, petroleum,

or indeed individual films like *Avatar* or *Confucius* do. Though it is true that over-saturation of any particular genre in a relatively short period of time can lead to audience exhaustion and thus a decline in that genre's appeal, in general the success or failure of a genre is a function not necessarily of the genre itself but rather of any given film's particular way of utilizing that genre. And finally, the main thing to understand is that these genres, or at least the more successful deployments of particular genres, go on to influence future film productions, which, in turn, adapt and restructure, invoke and redeploy the genre, enabling the genre to generate new possibilities for future film practice. As with the technical, financial, personnel, and industrial linkages between the cinemas of Taiwan, the PRC, and Hong Kong, which simultaneously bind them together and distinguish them from each other, genres extend back and forth across, between, and beyond the several Chinese cinemas, always changing and developing at every stop in this network.

From Affect to Effect

Metacinema, then, I am arguing—not only in terms of the pure forms of mise-en-abîme or quotation, but also and more crucially in the more abstract citational strategies I have indicated above, as well as in terms of genre play that invokes, updates, and subverts film conventions surrounding any particular genre—is a privileged site for investigating the limits of what is possible for film practice in China. Of course, other factors such as studio dispositions and finances, technological advances, or censorship regimes also play integral roles in limiting and channeling Chinese film production. Naturally, in the chapters that follow I will include considerations of these factors when it seems prudent to do so. But, to a greater or lesser extent, these issues are already prominent in current studies of Chinese cinemas. As such, my focus in these pages will fall principally on metacinema, particularly inasmuch as it allows a vantage on film as a special sort of cultural signifier that invites active viewer participation in the ultimate meaning and possibilities of the discourse of film itself.

Let me try to be specific in terms of the mechanisms I see enabling metacinema to play such a role. Weihong Bao has recently proposed thinking about cinema as an integral part of what she terms an "affective medium." She understands "cinema as a material, aesthetic, and social medium deeply connected to the artificial production of affect central for the consolidation of media institutions and the formation of mass publics."[27] She uses the metaphor of fire to show how the affective medium of cinema kindles an ember in its viewers that then blazes hot. This metaphor is quite apt for socially oriented cinema including China's leftist cinema of the 1930s and especially for the propaganda cinema beginning with the Second Sino-Japanese War and continuing through the 1970s. The notion of cinema as a central player in such an affective medium may be particularly useful to understanding the functions of such activist cinema, but it need not be limited to these cases. That is to say, Bao

argues that the affective medium can, for example in the cases of leftist or propaganda films, be effective in transmitting certain affects to its audience and that these affects are then available to be mobilized for mass social protests or other activity. If this is true, it seems reasonable to conclude that in other contexts, including the pluralized market-oriented cinemas of recent decades, the same affective medium may lend itself to encouraging other behaviors, running the gamut from social activism (though, in truth, seldom if ever of the mass rally variety these days) to aesthetic contemplation. Such an affective medium provides a template for the transferal of affect from text to audience as well as for its translation into specific behaviors called for by that affect.[28]

Despite its recent ascendance in academic work, affect remains fairly nebulous as a concept. Inasmuch as affect exists alongside, related to but not subsumed in, cognition, it is perhaps not surprising that the critical vocabulary of scholarship finds a precise definition of affect difficult to establish.[29] The editors of the recent *The Affect Theory Reader* suggest the following:

> Affect is born in *in-between-ness* and resides as accumulative *beside-ness*. Affect can be understood then as a gradient of bodily capacity—a supple incrementalism of ever-modulating force-relations—that rises and falls not only along various rhythms and modalities of encounter but also through the troughs and sieves of sensation and sensibility . . . At once intimate and impersonal, affect *accumulates* across both relatedness and interruptions in relatedness, becoming a palimpsest of force-encounters traversing the ebbs and swells of intensities that pass between "bodies" (bodies defined not by an outer skin-envelope or other surface boundary but by their potential to reciprocate or co-participate in the passages of affect) . . . In this ever-gathering accretion of force-relations (or, conversely, in the peeling or wearing away of such sedimentations) lie the real powers of affect, affect as potential: a body's *capacity* to affect and be affected.[30]

Affect is created and transferred through contacts and encounters between bodies capable of affecting one another. Affect is both material and ephemeral; it is simultaneously of the mind and the body; it touches upon the emotions, the senses, and the intellect in ways that cannot be predicted.[31] Above all, affect is moving; that is, it moves across and through bodies thereby generating further momentum. Most pertinent to the present study is the conception of affect as an accumulated potentiality.

The potential force of affect to move bodies replicates at the moment of engagement with the text (in our case, viewing a film) what I have been describing in terms of textual interaction as metacinema. I have argued that metacinema, whether at the level of the circulation of generic conventions, or at the level of invoking either (or both) the production or the consumption metacinematic event, or at the level of intertextual citing of specific film texts, marks the transmission, progression, and expansion of the limits of the possible in Chinese film practice. In the same way, the encounter of text with audience has the capacity to induce a transfer of affect across bodies that is not merely a kind of relocation, but more important, marks

the possibility to depart in new directions. As with the iterations of genres among and between global, regional, and local film industries that I discussed in the previous section, the affect generated through the metacinematic encounter of film text and viewer engenders repetitions and recreations. Such affect moves the viewer to become a producer who reinvents and expands affect through the creation of new (meta)cinematic texts or bodies. Weihong Bao's "affective medium" indicates the mechanism that facilitates this transferal of momentum in the course of the encounter between bodies, that is, through the viewing of a film. The nature or content of the affect so transmitted is, of course, unique to the particular encounter of specific texts and audiences. But the capacity to affect and be affected, I argue, can be gauged in the propensity of characters within Chinese metacinematic films to move from consuming film products to functioning analogously to directorial roles in the creation of new cinematic possibilities. That is, in instances of consumption metacinema, we view characters respond to viewing a film product, we see them assume the affective momentum transmitted to them by means of the affective medium of film, and we, in turn, also access that affective momentum in ways that correspond to and are modeled on the characters on screen.

In a different but relevant context, John Gibson has argued that representation, rather than the endless play and deferral of meaning deconstructionists would have us understand, connects image to the world by means "not of standing *in* for some other thing but by standing *for* it, in the sense that the narrative marks the moment of cultural production through which an aspect of our world is given form, shape, sense, and thus offers the lens through which we see it."[32] In this way, representations, including films, become the standards or criteria we marshal not only to understand but, more important, to make our way through the world. If I may return once more to the example of Wang Jiazhi singing "The Wandering Songstress," she forms her way of being in the world from watching movies; at that particular moment in her life, she takes her cue from the movies and acts accordingly. *Street Angel* affects her in such a way that she is moved to produce new cinematic potentials.

Victor Fan's recent fascinating study of early Chinese film theory becomes relevant here. Although the periods we each are examining are separated by forty years or more, there are a number of resonances that I would like to highlight. First, Fan consistently emphasizes the imbrication of the Chinese film industries in local, regional, and global networks and discourses. Second, and more to the point, the notion of *bizhen*, which Fan translates as "approaching reality," becomes salient in his analysis not for the photographic and mimetic properties of film but rather for "the affective state that the painting [and by extension, film] is capable of producing in the sensorium of the beholders."[33] Similarly, throughout his book, Fan stresses the potentialities inherent in but not concretized in film. So for example, in his discussion of another important theoretical concept, *guanzhao*, which he translates as "observation-reflection," he sums up in this way: "It is where the actual and the virtual, the past and the present coalesce in a zone of indiscernibility."[34] If for Fan

the focus of his exploration into Chinese film theory remains with the ontology of cinema, and specifically its relationship to reality, where I strike out on a different path is in my insistence on the importance of the act of viewing by an affective subject and especially the affective state thereby elicited in the viewer. That is, the potentiality that Fan emphasizes in his consideration of Chinese film is only ever realized in the process of an audience watching the film. And when we witness characters forming new ways of being in the world through recourse to the criteria established for them in the films they watch, we see our own viewership marked with the potential to become the directors of our own films.

For our present concerns, then, what a focus on metacinema allows us to see are precisely the two paths available for transferring affect by means of the affective medium and its translation into effective modes of being in the world. Specifically, metacinema allows us to view the construction of filmic narratives through observation of mise-en-abîme production. We thus see what the purpose of the various techniques are, and can infer what the intended affect is that should be elicited by deployment of any given technique. Quotation-consumption metacinema, on the other hand, shows the ways people view films and the ways they may model behavior on the scenarios they see depicted in films. This behavior, in turn, transfers affect back across the affective medium, producing still further effects. Thus, the viewing of films allows these characters to direct their own lives and find their own way of being in the world that structures them analogously to film directors. Of course, filmmaking is always already a collaborative project, but we imagine directors to have final say over the finished product. Likewise, characters making their way through social situations are not islands unto themselves. And yet the metacinematic modes of being they have accumulated in the process of being film viewers allows them, like a film director, ultimate control over the course they take. One of the best ways for us to recognize this translation of affect into effect, I argue, is the genre play that characterizes the specific close readings I offer in the following chapters.

Obviously, in the context of the most recent few decades in which Chinese film culture has turned resoundingly away from collectivist modes of address to market conditions of production, distribution, and exhibition, the scope of action cultivated by the affective filmic medium has similarly turned to individual, even consumerist, effects. Even so, in the context of authoritarian regimes (less relevant to Taiwanese society, to be sure, but increasingly threatening Hong Kong society, and longstanding in the PRC), self-directed individual behavior has the potential to be disruptive of routines designed to instill social docility (Chapter 6 will address one example of this). More than this, the possibility always remains for the affective medium to be turned to cultivate larger social effects in film audiences. Metacinema dramatizes this process, and thus clarifies it, for us. For in metacinema we see the representational world constructed and confirmed in its fictionality. And as such, and in line with Gibson's premise precisely for this reason, metacinema likewise

shows us the effects of the affective medium of film on viewers to alter and even construct from the ground up their own ways of being in the world. Or so I will argue in the chapters that follow.

This book begins with two separate considerations of the pure forms of meta-cinema. Chapter 2, "Production," explores the global circulation of the musical genre from Bollywood to Hollywood and on to Hong Kong and China in the film *Perhaps Love* (*Ruguo ai*, 2004, dir. Peter Chan). This film depicts the filming of a musical film, called *Forget-Me-Not*, and thus comments upon film production practices within the context of the circulating generic conventions of the musical. Chapter 3, "Consumption," looks at the deployment of horror film convention in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (Busan, 2004, dir. Tsai Ming-liang), a film set in a dilapidated old movie theater in Taipei slated to close. As in "Production," observations on film consumption become possible in the way the film likens the theater audience to ghosts haunting the old theater.

Chapter 4, "True Lies," examines the process of fictionalization and narrativity in two recent films: *In the Heat of the Sun* (*Yangguang canlan de rizi*, 1994, dir. Jiang Wen) and *Suzhou River* (*Suzhou he*, 2000, dir. Lou Ye). These two films highlight the role of the filmmaker in constructing a story. At the same time, we see in these two films the ways that previous films and film genres become grist to the mill for future filmmaking and indeed for individual behavior. Taken together, these first three chapters form a group inasmuch as they each emphasize the ways that film texts are intertextually and metacinematically constructed and consumed. "True Lies" also forms a bridge to the next two chapters because it introduces the interconnected notions of narration, authenticity, truth, and reality.

Chapter 5, "Documentarization," confronts the recent popularity in interna-tional art house and film festival circuits of Chinese documentary and juxtaposes that with Jia Zhangke's practice of mixing documentary with fiction film. His practice exposes what Rey Chow has referred to as the documentary "pose."[35] This chapter also argues that Jia undercuts the indexical value of documentary practice, but paradoxically increases the authenticity of his portrayals. In fact, I argue, he multiplies models for ways of being in the world through this mixed documen-tary form. Chapter 6, "Beyond Allegory," looks at *Lost in Beijing* (*Pingguo*, 2007) by female director Li Yu. While *Lost in Beijing* addresses some contemporary social issues, especially concerning women, I argue that a full accounting of the film cannot be limited to allegorical interpretations, which have been more or less stand-ard in modern Chinese studies. Instead, *Lost in Beijing* relies on its deployment of the family melodramatic form as well as the symbolic to mark its cultural critique. Finally, the conclusion elaborates on the capacity of metacinematic practices to reveal the potential for film in China (and elsewhere) as expressive and aesthetic forms and as social and political practice.

7

Conclusion

In my analysis of *Perhaps Love* in Chapter 2, "Production," I largely avoided any discussion of the fourth lead role—Monty, who is played by the Korean star Ji Jin-hee. In part, this was because his role was not directly pertinent to the analysis I proposed there, but in truth another reason is that, before working through the issues explored in this book, I did not know how to account for this character. I think I may be able to do so now, however. The bulk of *Perhaps Love*, which I address in Chapter 2, is actually set within a quickly delineated (and even more quickly wrapped up) frame structure that is easy to overlook. In this frame, Monty is riding on a bus where he describes the metaphor that we all may be considered to be the lead character in the movie of our own life, but from another perspective are merely extras in the movies of other people's lives. Other passengers on the bus serve as examples. Monty's job, he says, is that of editor, organizing the clips of film into a coherent—and meaningful—narrative. This, of course is metacinema at another level: one of figuration that explicitly models ways of being in the world on film structures. When Monty gets off the bus, he steps into the opening number of *Forget-Me-Not*; immediately we are in the studio lot, and the main narrative begins. The film ends, on the other hand, with Monty boarding that same bus, leaving the studio sound stage and closing off this narrative frame.

This diegetic level immediately above the main storyline is shot, and the people and objects in it appear, in a thoroughly ordinary manner: sleeping or bored or absorbed in their own concerns as the bus delivers them to their various destinations. None of the spectacle that will enliven the majority of the film is evident here. Thus, though of course narratologically there is a distinction, I think we must understand this diegetic level as corresponding to our extradiegetic reality. The metaphor that Monty elaborates linking our everyday lives to film, then, directly speaks to the fundamental argument I have been making in this book about the uses of metacinema. Film, as an art of representation, does not mimic real life, but rather, as John Gibson argues, stands for reality, giving it shape and focus so that we may find ways of being in the world through the viewing experience.[1] The organization and cohesiveness of the achieved narrative form provides precisely the vantage that our everyday experience may not. The film, that is, enables insights into lived

experience that elude us without the representational form structuring our view-
point. At important moments in *Perhaps Love*, then, it is not surprising that Monty
nudges the characters in certain directions that clarify and refine their ways of being
in that world. The metacinematic form of *Perhaps Love*, and perhaps especially by
means of this frame structure, reflects this process back out of the diegesis onto us
the audience: we see that we too may refine and clarify our own ways of being in the
world through a new perspective gained from watching movies.

Similarly, in Chapter 2 I did not directly address the scenes in *Perhaps Love*
set in a screening room (set up as a small movie theater) both because my analysis
did not require it, but also because, at that point, I was not sure how to account for
them adequately. Now, perhaps, I can. Almost exactly in the middle of the film,
during one of the reminiscences of their life in Beijing ten year ago, as a crane shot
pulls away from Sun and Lin in an embrace on a frozen Beijing canal, we cut to the
projection booth of the screening room, where Monty is watching this memory
projected on the screen. Sun Na and Lin Jiandong are watching from the screening
room chairs. Whereas previously this room had been used for screening rough cuts
of *Forget-Me-Not*, here we see memories directly presented as film texts, available
to be reviewed and considered, available to transmit affective resonances across the
affective medium of film. Life, transformed as and through film, returns to affect
future actions. As the scene progresses, Sun and Lin embrace (but do not kiss; he
clearly attempts a kiss, but she dodges). The camera, positioned behind the two in
the auditorium seats captures a marvelously symmetric image of Sun (foreground,
screen-left) hugging Lin (foreground, screen-right), while projected behind them
Sun (background, screen-right) is hugging Lin (background, screen-left). For both

Figure 7.1
Affective response to projected memories in *Perhaps Love* (2005)

couples, Sun's head is in front of Lin's relative to the respective cameras. Here we see the externalization of affect, which the viewing of film text enables, that is then transmitted to the viewers. Most interesting of all, Nie Wen arrives in the projection booth, and though Monty moves to stop the projection, Nie insists on viewing to the end. He, too, is affected by the images he sees, but in his case the affect elicited is jealousy. Even for a film such as *Perhaps Love*, which in Chapter 2 I argued is organized around production metacinema, this moment of consumption metacinema proves central to the development of the characters' affective states.

There is a similar moment early on in Feng Xiaogang's huge hit *Big Shot's Funeral* (*Dawan*, 2001) when Lucy (Rosamund Kwan), Yoyo (Ge You), and Tony (Paul Mazursky) gather in a screening room to review the film Yoyo captured as Don Tyler (Donald Sutherland) suffered a stroke.[2] The footage captured under these conditions (at a 90° angle since the camera was knocked on its side when Yoyo ran for help) marks the indexical and testimonial function of *xianchang*; indeed, it is taken as evidence of Tyler's last wishes and bears legal weight precisely for this reason. The making-of documentary that Yoyo ostensibly is filming as Tyler remakes Bertolucci's *The Last Emperor* (1987) is intended not as a presentation of life as it is in China, the way the new documentary movement thought of itself. Instead, this documentary is meant as a further item to be included in a DVD release of Tyler's film that will increase the marketability of that DVD product. Nevertheless, the unexpected presence of Yoyo's camera at the moment of onset of Tyler's illness gains unintended meaning precisely because of the *xianchang* indexicality stemming from being on-the-spot. And the characters in the film treat it this way. Tyler, in what, for all anyone knows, might be his last conscious moments, instructs Yoyo to give him a comedy funeral. Upon seeing the footage in the darkened screening room, Tony is forced to admit that "it's an authorization" of the comedy funeral. Outside the screening room, when Tony asks Lucy what Yoyo is going to do she says, "The idiot's going to do it." To which Tony replies, "Moronic."

The affective power of watching film to create new actions in its viewership is dramatized for us in this scene. And it leads to all of the crazy antics satirizing our modern, market-driven, consumerist, and hypermediated lifestyle that fill out *Big Shot's Funeral*. It is worth noting that the footage of Tyler's medical emergency screened in this scene is not the cause of Yoyo's decision to fulfill Tyler's request for a comedy funeral. His viewing of the film confirms and reiterates the affective connection he and Tyler had built during their short acquaintance. This is why Tony and Lucy do not react in the same way; they do not have the same investment in this idea as Yoyo does. Similarly, the affective response of Sun and Lin upon viewing their memories as film is one of rekindled sentiment; whereas, for Nie, it is anger and jealousy. The affective medium of film acts to transmit the human connection, but the ways that connection is felt is crucially dependent on the particular recipient. Of course, the irony is that the funeral so constituted in *Big Shot's Funeral* becomes one huge spectacularized and mediatized event, not a moment of personal

remembrance. Happily, Tyler recovers from his stroke and makes a metacinematic movie par excellence of the whole series of events.

In the examples of the screening rooms in *Perhaps Love* and *Big Shot's Funeral*, there is a certain distillation of many of the issues I have been concerned to elaborate in this book. In different ways the various illustrations I have raised in this space have confronted a series of binaries: real and fake, truth and fiction, narrative and spectacle, confinement and freedom, global and local, art and industry, society and aesthetics, affect and effect. I hope that I have been clear that, rather than take these as instances of either/or mutual exclusion, I find it much more fruitful to consider these binaries in dynamic tension. Most important of these binaries is the mutually reinforcing relationship between production and consumption of film images. And as I have been arguing, the best place to see this relationship is in generic play and more generally in metacinema.

In fact, in this context it is worth noting that *Big Shot's Funeral* denies representing two crucial moments of human affection. First, in her initial grief for Tyler's sudden illness, Lucy asks Yoyo to hold and comfort her, but he proves incapable of performing this human intimacy. Second, at the very end in Tyler's recreated film, Yoyo and Lucy are scripted to kiss. But again this intimacy proves too awkward for Yoyo to pull off. The camera cuts to Tyler, who directing the scene says, "Come on guys, I'm not going to say 'cut' until you kiss." After about a five second pause, Tyler says, "Cut." We the audience do not see the kiss, but we do see the big smile on Tyler's face as he witnesses the kiss. There seem to be two, perhaps contradictory but mutually held meanings in this refusal to show the embrace and kiss. First, in *Big Shot's Funeral*—and, given its heavily metacinematic form, by extension all film products—which is so fully imbricated in our globally connected and hypermediatized society, the implication seems to be that such human intimacy can only be spoiled by its presentation in film.[3] Second, the affective power of seeing can sometimes, as here, be stronger for seeing the reaction of others who witness it rather than seeing the event oneself. A converse example is when Mr. Biao (Fu Biao) comes to run through his part in the funeral and breaks down in tears on command. His role selling calcium supplements is augmented by the fake emotion he performs on cue. And yet, the three witnesses, Yoyo, Lucy, and Louis (Ying Da), are truly moved to tears because of the power of Biao's performance. The real effects this (falsified) performance creates reminds us of the affective response elicited by the fictionalized stories and documentaries I discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. That is to say, the performance, as a major component constituting the affective medium, is grounded in the effects it creates (the affects it transfers), not necessarily in the factuality of its basis.

Although I have spent much of my effort in this book discussing the affective power of watching to spur action, following the example of the observations I have just made in regard to *Big Shot's Funeral*, I would like now to shift tack somewhat and point out the ways a film can augment its affectivity through what is not shown.

The absences of Meimei and Liu Pingguo at the ends of *Suzhou River* and *Lost in Beijing* respectively (and conversely, the trapped presences of Sun Na at the end of *Perhaps Love* as well as Xiaojun at the end of *In the Heat of the Sun*) mark them as having mastered the art of being an audience and converted that to directing their own stories. As with Don Tyler's smile at the end of *Big Shot's Funeral*, the power of the human connection forged in the course of *Suzhou River* and *Lost in Beijing* is conveyed by the effects their disappearances cause in those witnessing it. Put another way, these disappearances are like the unseen acousmêtre who gains power over the narrative precisely by being unseen: Pingguo and Meimei gain the authority to direct their own stories.

Of course, what Pingguo and Meimei resemble more than anything else is a movie director, who almost always remains unseen behind the camera but determines the film's form and structure. Although in this book I started by considering production metacinema—because the cameras, crew, and other accoutrements are most easily seen—and then progressed to consumption metacinema, we must realize by now, and the cases of Meimei and Pingguo are exemplary here, that the actual process works in the opposite direction. That is to say, one begins as a consumer of films, becoming attuned to the methods and tactics of film narrative, experiencing the affective effects of cinema in oneself first. Then the sensitive reader of films may decide to disappear behind the camera and begin to create new cinematic visions, deploying the technologies they have seen and developing new ones to convey their own perspectives and narratives.

To be sure, this is true of all film, since all equally access the affective medium. The real value of metacinema, then, is that it allows us to theorize a process of cinematic development that, rather than emphasizing disruption and novel innovation, stipulates a method of adoption, adaptation, updating, and revision. Genre elasticity—through experimentation, combination, or expansion—is prototypical of such a developmental process. Popular genres such as the musical, martial arts, or horror film travel through different global industries where they accumulate various sedimentary layers of cultural resonances, which remain on call for redeployment in new films. Likewise, the global, slow-paced, art house, *vérité* aesthetic, which has been so important for filmmakers such as Tsai Ming-liang or Jia Zhangke, can be adapted to any number of uses: in recent Chinese film often that of documentary realism, but also the "mainstream art films" made by Li Yu. Naturally, such a developmental process occurs behind the scenes all the time. The benefit of metacinema, then, is to bring this process into focus and allow us to conceptualize its mechanisms.

There are a few preliminary conclusions to draw from a recognition of this developmental process that metacinema reveals. First, although I have used the term *developmental* to describe this process, by no means should we conceive this process as unidirectional. The variety of modes of adoption, adaptation, updating, and revision that this book has considered—from newly available DV technology to fast-paced editing emphasizing spectacle, from horror film icons reconceived

Figure 7.2
Tsai Ming-liang and Alphonse Youth-Leigh watch *Dragon Gate Inn* in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* (2003)

in modern temporality to fictionalized documentary, from symbolic representation to *xianchang*, and so on—should be adequate to make this point. Second, and similarly, this developmental process is occurring simultaneously across the broad spectrum of Chinese cinemas, including Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the PRC as well as throughout different cinematic modes of address, including blockbusters such as *Perhaps Love* or *Big Shot's Funeral*, "mainstream art film" like *Lost in Beijing*, Fifth Generation historical pieces like *In the Heat of the Sun*, transnational noir spy thrillers such as Ang Lee's *Lust, Caution*, or independent productions including Tsai's *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* and Lou Ye's *Suzhou River*, as well as Jia Zhangke's studio-produced art house favorites. The regional and industrial convergence in metacinematic modes calls out to be recognized not so much as an erasure of local specificities but as linkage points that reflect the ways these directors and industries, in all their abundant styles, are responding to the same stimuli.

Third, this process does not stop. Just because one steps behind the camera to make films does not mean that one stops watching films. So for example, we see in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* that Tsai Ming-liang inserts himself in the audience watching the screening of *Dragon Gate Inn*. Instead, we should understand the cycle of consuming and producing films to be continuous and, most of all, self-perpetuating.

Fourth, despite the multilinearity and various proliferating aspects I have emphasized in terms of this developmental process we can find modeled in metacinema, the thing that unifies this tremendous diversity is the central concern of engaging the affective medium of film. Whether it be the spectacle of song and dance, the invigorating revolutionary rhetoric of Xiaojun's Cultural Revolution reminiscences,

Jia Zhangke's amplified realism, the tragedy of immiscible ghosts confronted with modern temporality, Liu Pingguo's warped mirror image that allows her to see and understand herself and so be capable of striking out on her own with her child, or the videographer's narrativization in *Suzhou River*, the affective medium of film discloses ways of being in the world that remain viable beyond the diegetic realm and thus serve as models for future filmmaking or indeed personal behavior.

And this brings us to the final conclusion we may draw from such a first consideration of metacinema in Chinese films of recent decades. The affective medium cannot transmit anything without an audience to transmit it to. Just as for Nameless in *Hero*, the crucial point is not the tale itself but how the King of Qin responds to it. To be sure, we the audience respond according to the specific ways in which the particular film has conditioned us to respond; there are more or less appropriate or inappropriate reactions to the transmission of the affective medium. But, to borrow Tao's words from *The World*, that is only the beginning. Ultimately what we learn from film, how we model our own ways of being in the world on what we have seen, is dependent upon our own sensitivity and perspicacity as viewers. The most versatile of us, such as the teenaged Xiaojun, Meimei, or Liu Pingguo, take those visions as a starting point to create something else entirely, as yet unseen before.

Notes

Chapter 1

1. Zhang Yimou would extend this motif of a bamboo forest setting in his martial arts extravaganza *House of Flying Daggers* (*Shimian maifu*, 2004).
2. We could certainly think of this in terms of T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," and the not unrelated notion of the anxiety of influence proposed by Howard Bloom. See *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1975), 37–44, and *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
3. See Zhang Zhen, *An Amorous History of the Silver Screen: Shanghai Cinema, 1896–1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), especially xiii–xxxiii, and Kristine Harris, "*Two Stars of the Silver Screen*: The Metafilm as Chinese Modern," in *History in Images: Pictures and Public Space in Modern China*, ed. Christian Henriot and Wen-hsin Yeh (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 2012), 191–244, for discussions of these two films in metacinematic terms.
4. For an extensive discussion of *Scenes of City Life*, see Weihong Bao, *Fiery Cinema: The Emergence of an Affective Medium in China, 1915–1945* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 224–61.
5. For general examinations of reflexivity in film and literature, see Lucien Dällenback, *The Mirror in the Text*, trans. Jeremy Whitely with Emma Hughes (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), and Robert Stam, *Reflexivity in Film and Literature: From Don Quixote to Jean-Luc Godard* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).
6. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Shocken Books, 1968), 234.
7. Stephen Mamber, "In Search of Radical Metacinema," in *Comedy/Cinema/Theory*, ed. Andrew Horton (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 79–90.
8. Juansheng, the narrator in Lu Xun's "Regret for the Past" (*Shangshi*, 1925), famously berates himself for falling back on the tired clichés of lovemaking drawn from movies when he proposes to his lover, Zijun. See Lu Xun, "Shangshi," in *Lu Xun quanji*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2005), 113–34.
9. Jean Ma also discusses this scene briefly. See her *Sounding the Modern Woman: The Songstress in Chinese Cinema* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 2.

10. Jason McGrath, *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), especially 165–202. At the same time, we might add that films such as Martin Scorsese's *Hugo* (2011) show that recent metacinematic concerns are not limited to Chinese cinemas.

11. My thanks to Eileen Cheng who suggested this parallel.

12. Sheldon Lu, "Foreword," *Asian Cinema* 27, no. 1 (2016): 3.

13. Mark Gallagher's description of how Tony Leung Chiu-wai's sex appeal transcends but is also conditioned by the complex interactions between regional Chinese cinemas and global art film audiences is an excellent case study of just such a point. See Mark Gallagher, "Tony Leung Chiu-Wai: Acting Sexy in Hong Kong and China," *Asian Cinema* 27, no. 1 (2016): 43–58.

14. Hou Hsiao-hsien, as one example, was executive producer for Zhang Yimou's classic Fifth Generation film *Raise the Red Lantern* (*Da hong denglong gaogao gua*, 1991).

15. Shu-mei Shih, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations Across the Pacific* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), especially 1–8. See also Leo Ou-fan Lee, "Ang Lee's *Lust, Caution* and Its Reception," *boundary 2* 35, no. 3 (2008): 223–38, for an account describing a similarly diverse reaction to Lee's later film *Lust, Caution*.

16. Chris Berry, "Sino-Korean Screen Connections: Towards a History in Fragments," *Journal of Chinese Cinemas* (2016): 3.

17. Marko Juvan, *History and Poetics of Intertextuality*, trans. Timothy Pogačar (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2008), especially 166–78.

18. Though certainly an oversimplification, these two conceptions of genre may be represented by Steve Neale, *Genre and Hollywood* (London: Routledge, 2000) and Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: BFI, 1999).

19. Bao, *Fiery Cinema*, 39–90.

20. Ma, *Sounding the Modern Woman*.

21. Li Yinghui and Fan Linlin, "Zhongguo 17 nian dianying 'leixingpian' qiantan," *Dianying wenxue* 21 (November 2007): 21.

22. Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995); Jerome Silbergeld, *China into Film: Frames of Reference in Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999).

23. See, for example, Yiman Wang, *Remaking Chinese Cinema: Through the Prism of Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Hollywood* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013). Yingjin Zhang also includes statistics showing the relative dominance of Hollywood imports in the Chinese industries over the course of the twentieth century. See his *Chinese National Cinema* (London: Routledge, 2004).

24. Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic, and Temporal Critique* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Kenneth Chan, *Remade in Hollywood: The Global Chinese Presence in Transnational Cinemas* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009).

25. Jason McGrath has argued that Jia Zhangke's aesthetic is influenced as much by home grown Sixth Generation norms as by an "international art-house aesthetic." See Jason McGrath, "The Independent Cinema of Jia Zhangke: From Postsocialist Realism to a Transnational Aesthetic," in *The Urban Generation*, ed. Zhang Zhen, 81–114. I endorse this view in Chapter 4, "Documentarization and Amplified Realism in Jia Zhangke's Films."

26. Sharon LaFraniere, "China's Zeal for 'Avatar' Crowds Out 'Confucius,'" *The New York Times*, January 29, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/30/business/global/30avatar.html?_r=0, last accessed August 19, 2015.

27. Bao, *Fiery Cinema*, 6.

28. Though it is still speculative, it may be that mirror neurons provide the physical mechanism that allows affect to be translated from text to audience and thence into action. Mirror neurons are activated both when performing an action or feeling an emotion *and* when observing others doing these things. Thus, it is theorized that mirror neurons play crucial roles in activities such as learning through observation, empathy, coordinating social relations, and so on. See Sandra Blakeslee, "Cells that Read Minds," *The New York Times*, January 10, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/10/science/10mirr.html, last accessed September 25, 2015. See also Anna Gibbs, "After Affect: Sympathy, Synchrony, and Mimetic Communication," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 186–205.

29. Lawrence Grossberg notes the ease, and intellectual laziness, of using "affect" as a catch-all theoretical term. See "Affect's Future: Rediscovering the Virtual in the Actual," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, 314–15.

30. Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, "An Inventory of Shimmers," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, 2, original emphasis.

31. Nigel Thrift says: "their results cannot be pre-given (although they can, of course, be pre-treated)." See his *Non-Representational Theory: Space / Politics / Affect* (London: Routledge, 2008), 2.

32. John Gibson, *Fiction and the Weave of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 73, original emphasis.

33. Victor Fan, *Cinema Approaching Reality: Locating Chinese Film Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 33.

34. Fan, *Cinema Approaching Reality*, 108.

35. Rey Chow, "China as Documentary in the Age of Hypermediality: Some Basic Questions," keynote address given at the "Imagining Chinese Cinemas in the 21st Century" conference held at the University of Exeter, Exeter, UK, July 9, 2012.

Chapter 2

1. Representative examples include Rey Chow, "By Way of Mass Commodities: Love in *Comrades, Almost a Love Story*," in *Sentimental Fabulations, Contemporary Chinese Films: Attachment in the Age of Global Visibility* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 105–22; and Lisa Odham Stokes, *Peter Ho-sun Chan's "He's a Woman, She's a Man"* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009).

2. Applause has since closed its doors and was replaced by Chan's new production company We Pictures in 2009.

3. Darrell William Davis and Emilie Yueh-yu Yeh, *East Asian Screen Industries* (London: British Film Institute, 2008), 97–99.

4. Vivian P. Y. Lee, *Hong Kong Cinema Since 1997: The Post-Nostalgic Imagination* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 200–209.

rubric of the abandoned lover in her *Literary Remains: Death, Trauma, and Lu Xun's Refusal to Mourn* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), 111–39.

17. Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900–1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 112.

18. Lu, "Nala zouhou zenyang," 167.

19. Both couples have migrated to Beijing: An and Liu from "the countryside," and Lin and Wang from the south, Guangdong or perhaps Hong Kong. The hierarchical ordering of these economic travels is significant, but it is also noteworthy that none of these four are local Beijingers.

20. Many scholars have examined the influence of Western culture on early modern China. An excellent recent example is Theodore Huters, *Bringing the World Home: Appropriating the West in Late Qing and Early Republican China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005).

21. I made a similar argument, for slightly different reasons, in regard to the capitalist disenchantment of human relationships that I read in Tsai Ming-liang's *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* in Chapter 3, "Consumption." The central role of the increasing penetration of capital into all aspects of human life, it seems to me, cannot be missed, whether it be in *Goodbye, Dragon Inn* or *Lost in Beijing*.

Conclusion

1. John Gibson, *Fiction and the Weave of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

2. Jason McGrath has a wonderful analysis of *Big Shot's Funeral*, teasing out all of the mise-en-abîme metacinematic aspects of the film. See his *Postsocialist Modernity: Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Criticism in the Market Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 187–94.

3. The noted desensitization and increased difficulty in establishing close interpersonal (i.e., affective) relationships in people who have prolonged and regular viewing habits of pornography, may similarly show the converse effects of viewing in explicit detail such material functions of the body, which otherwise are thought of as intimate.

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